

January 16, 2003

30 YEARS UNDER ROE

Controversial abortionist expands practice

By Mary Beth DeLisi
Staff Writer

As the 30th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* draws near, abortion advocates' cry of keeping abortions "legal and safe" seems to get louder.

Yet, one abortion practitioner who was sanctioned six years ago by the state's Board of Medical Examiners against advertising his procedures as "safe" has expanded his reach in the diocese with the opening of a new clinic in Woodbridge.

"Women have the right to know that the operator of the local 'women's clinic' is infamous for his malpractice."

The abortion provider is Dr. Steven Chase Brigham, an abortionist whose license was revoked in New York in 1994 for two botched abortions and revoked in Florida in 1996 for his failure to notify the state that he was practicing there even though he had told state officials he would not, according to secular press reports.

Dr. Brigham was also forced to surrender his license to practice in Pennsylvania in 1992; he did so in return for the state dropping its investigation into his medical practices.

It has been widely reported that Dr. Brigham, who did not

return phone calls to *The Catholic Spirit*, is part owner of American Women's Services, a company that operates more than a dozen abortion clinics in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland and New Jersey. New Jersey is the only state that allows him to practice.

Recently American Women's Services began operating in the American Wellness Center which opened last summer in Woodbridge. A staff member at the American Wellness Center confirmed by phone that American Women's Services, which she described as part of the American Wellness Center, was fully operational in the delivery of abortion services.

Joan Fasanello, director of Life Choices Pregnancy Center, Phillipsburg, said, "Women have the right to know that the operator of the local 'women's clinic' is infamous for his malpractice. Children are dying and women are being wounded," she stated.

Marie Tasy, director of public and legislative affairs for New Jersey Right to Life calls the clinic's name hypocritical. "'Wellness' conjures up thoughts of healing, improving or maintaining one's health. Abortion does none of these; in fact, the act of abortion itself is a direct contradiction of this term. Given Brigham's less than stellar record, it is shameful and highly irresponsible for the state of New Jersey to allow him to continue performing abortions on unsuspecting women," Tasy remarked.

She continued, "New Jersey is the only state that allows this



Dr. Steven Chase Brigham

man to have an active license, and it speaks very poorly of our state. It sends the message that we don't care about women in New Jersey," said Tasy, adding, "The state seems more concerned about abortion politics than the health of women."

In 1996, the *Home News Tribune* reported that the New Jersey state's attorney general sought to have Dr. Brigham's license revoked after his performance of a dilatation and evacuation on a 20-year-old who was 26 weeks pregnant which resulted in the young woman requiring an emergency hysterectomy. But after listening to 29 days of testimony, the Board of Medical Examiners ruled in Dr. Brigham's favor and did not revoke his license. However, they did opt to bar him from using the words "safe" and "painless" in his advertisements.

In non-abortion related incidents, Dr. Brigham has also been accused of questionable real estate practices and served jail time for failing to file corporate income taxes.

Vicki Saporta, president of the National Abortion Federation, recently told *The Catholic Spirit* that Dr. Brigham wasn't a member of the federation's network of providers and was not eligible for membership because "he doesn't meet the guidelines for quality care."

Even some groups that deem themselves committed to abortion rights shun Dr. Brigham. Last year, Melinda DuBois, director of Buffalo Women's Services, told the *Buffalo News*, "There are a lot of people who know this man. He owns clinics all over the place. He has a really negative past. We are concerned about a physician [who]... has questionable medical practices," she commented.

Edward J. Gilhooly, executive director of the Legal Center for Defense of Life, Morristown, has concerns about some of Dr. Brigham's medical practices. He questions why many patients are sent from Dr. Brigham's Phillipsburg clinic to his clinic in Allentown, Pa. But Gilhooly believes he knows the answer.

"He does it to circumvent laws," he explained. Gilhooly said Pennsylvania abortion laws are more restrictive than New Jersey laws. In Pennsylvania, minors must have parental consent to have an abortion. In addition, women seeking abortions must first receive counseling and wait 24 hours before having the procedure done — except in the case of a medical emergency. Then these restrictions are waived, Gilhooly said.

In New Jersey, none of these restrictions apply. The state does